

Visualising As Imagining Seeing

Fabian Dorsch*

Kongress-Akten der deutschen Gesellschaft für Philosophie, vol. XXII, 2011, pp. 1-16.

In this paper, I would like to put forward the claim that, at least in some central cases, visualising consists literally in imagining seeing.¹ The first section of my paper is concerned with a defence of the specific argument for this claim that M. G. F. Martin presents in his paper *The Transparency of Experience* (Martin 2002). This argument has been often misunderstood (or ignored), and it is worthwhile to discuss it in detail and to illustrate what its precise nature is and why I take it to be sound.² In the second section, I present a second and independent argument for the claim that visualising is imagining seeing, which is not to be found in Martin's writings, despite some crucial similarities with his own argument – notably in the focus on the subjective aspects of visual experience. The last section deals with a particular objection to the idea that imagining takes perception as its direct object and says a bit more about how best to understand this claim.

* Email: fabian.dorsch@uclmail.net — Website: www.ideengeschichten.de

1 Some philosophers – notably Peacocke (1985) and O'Shaughnessy (2000): ch. 12 – have put forward stronger versions of this claim, extending it to imagining in other sense modalities, and to *all* instances of the various forms of sensory imagining. Martin is clearly sympathetic with this more general conclusion, as can be witnessed in Martin (2002, 404f.), as well as Martin (2001). See also Dorsch (2010) for further discussion.

2 The various objections, that have been raised against Martin's argument in the literature, are discussed and rejected in Dorsch (2010) and Dorsch (2012a, section 10.3). Here, I also ignore the fact that Martin's argument for the claim that some instances of visualising are instances of imagining seeing forms part of a wider argument against intentionalist – and for certain disjunctivist – theories of perception. In particular, I show in Dorsch (2010) that Martin's argument – although sound – is unable to fulfil the role originally intended for it by Martin: namely to undermine intentionalism about perceptual experiences and their phenomenal character. Indeed, I use Martin's argument to illustrate that a certain non-traditional version of intentionalism, which takes perceptual experiences to be self-reflexive, should be preferred over Martin's form of *phenomenal* disjunctivism and is in fact compatible with *structural* disjunctivism, according to which perceptions and hallucinations differ essentially not in their phenomenal character, but in their non-phenomenal structure (see also Dorsch 2012b).

1. Martin's Argument

The idea that visualising consists at least sometimes in imagining seeing is a special case of Martin's more general *Dependency Thesis* about all forms of the sensory imagination:³

[T]o imagine sensorily a φ is to imagine experiencing a φ [.] (Martin (2002): 404)

What we are thereby said to be aware of when imagining a perceptual experience is just that: some experience. More specifically, we are aware of the first-personal side of an experience, that is, of its phenomenal character (i.e., what the experience is like for the subject).⁴ We imagine some experience by imagining some instantiation of its character. Its third-personal side (if experiences have any) is, so to speak, 'invisible' to object-directed imagining. Of course, we can have additional thoughts about it. But it is not presented as part of a case of imagining with an experience as its object. The reason for this is that this form of imagining is experiential (or phenomenal), in the same sense in which seeing and visualising are visual. Just as the latter are limited to the presentation of visible entities, imagining an experience – or *experiential imagining*, as I will say – is restricted to the presentation of phenomenal aspects of mental episodes. The latter's non-phenomenal features of episodes lack an 'experiential appearance', so to speak. Again, experiential awareness does not differ in this respect from, say, visual awareness. When we see or visualise a lemon, we see or visualise its visual appearance, but not its biological nature, for example.

Intentionalists typically select the Dependency Thesis as the main target of their criticism of Martin's related argument against intentionalism. Indeed, if imaginative experience is to be understood in the same intentional terms as perceptual experience, it is difficult to understand why, say, seeing and visualising should not make us aware of the same objects, namely external things. If perception does not involve an awareness of an experience, why should imagination do so, if both are assumed to involve the same kind of intentional awareness?

3 Note that Martin uses 'experience' here as short for 'sense experience', such as perception or bodily sensation. My own use is less narrow in also including, say, visualising or other imaginative instances of sensory awareness (e.g., auditory imagining).

4 See, for instance, Nagel (1974) and Williamson (1990) for more or less the same characterisations of phenomenal character.

This doubt should be taken serious – not the least because it simply confirms that there is in fact a tension between the intentionalist thesis and the Dependency Thesis. While Martin draws the conclusion that the former should be given up, it is also very plausible to question the latter.

Some of the intentionalist objections, however, seem to have misunderstood the nature of Martin's argument for the Dependency Thesis. What is crucial here is that it concentrates on, and exploits the special features of, cases in which our episodes of visualising involve certain subjective properties. Subjective properties are characterised by the fact that they are experience-dependent: their instantiation is dependent on the occurrence of a specific experience. Martin's focus is on instances of visualising which involve a certain kind of perspectivalness. Accordingly, the conclusion of his argument should be understood as being restricted to those cases (or to similar cases, such as imaginative experiences involving aspects of painfulness or itchiness). What it therefore claims is that visualising is identical with imagining perceiving when it involves the subjective perspectival element at issue. Perhaps sensory imaginings are generally perspectival in this way. But, if not, the argument fails to establish the Dependency Thesis for all of them.

So, what is the kind of perspectivalness at issue? By perceiving an object, we may acquire knowledge about the latter's specific spatial location. But our perception does not thereby place the object in objective space. When we look at a building that is located roughly to the South-East of the bench on which we are currently sitting, we do not see it as being to the South-East of that bench. In particular, we do not perceive objects as being orientated in accordance with the cardinal directions. Instead, we see them as being orientated towards ourselves – for instance, we see the building as being to our left. What this means is that we perceive objects as part of egocentric space, and not as part of objective (or 'absolute') space.⁵ One manifestation of this fact is that our perception of the building inclines and entitles us to judge that it is to our actual left, but not that it is to the South-East of the bench. Coming to

⁵ It does not really matter for Martin's main argument whether we are concerned here with two different sets of spatial properties of objects (e.g., one objective, and the other subjective), or instead with two modes of presentation of one and the same set. What is relevant here is primarily the fact that our perceptual access to spatially located objects is perspectival and, in particular, presents them as orientated towards us, rather than in more objective terms. But many of the points involved in the argument can be described more easily by reference to egocentric properties. Besides, the postulation of subjective orientations is not much different from the postulation of subjective modes of presentation (see the similar issue raised below with respect to the aspect of leftishness and similar phenomenal aspects).

know the latter requires additional information – notably about our own location and orientation in objective space (see Campbell (1994): especially ch. 4).

None the less, our perceptions of egocentric locations are still as much concerned with actual space as is our knowledge of objective locations. We see the building as being to our actual left, as part of our actual environment. If this were not so, our experience would not be able to provide us with all the information necessary to properly interact with what we see – for example, to succeed in walking over to the actual building. But that perception does provide us with this information is illustrated by the fact that such interaction does not require inferring the presence of the building to our actual left from perceiving it as being to our left and believing that such experiences are (typically) concerned with the actual world. The issue of which world our perceptions are concerned with simply does not arise – it is our world, the world in which we perceive. Something similar is true of the temporal relevance of our perceptions: they concern our present environment. We see the building as presently being to our left, and not as having been there in the past, or as going to be there in the future.⁶

Part of our perception of the building as being to our actual left is implicit, however. We do not explicitly experience ourselves and our spatial relation to the building when perceiving the latter. We are not among the entities presented to us by our experience. Of course, we can see other perceivers – and even ourselves, say, by utilising a mirror or some similar apparatus which turns us into the object of our own perceptions. But normally, when we are simply subjects of perception and perceive the orientation of objects relative to us, we do not see us, but only the objects. Our own perspective is only implicitly reflected in our perceptual experiences, namely as the point of view orientated to which objects are presented to us. As a consequence, what figures explicitly in our experience is not the relational property of being to the left of us, but the monadic quality of being leftish.

It seems that such a quality can figure in perception in two different ways. The perceptual experience may instantiate the quality; or it may instead present an external object as having that quality. In both cases, this has consequences for the phenomenal character of the experience concerned. In the first case, the quality constitutes one of the non-presentational aspects of that character. In the second case, it is a constituent of one of the character's

⁶ In what follows, I concentrate on the fact that perceptions present objects in actual space and mention the temporal dimension only when it becomes relevant.

presentational aspects.⁷ That the quality of leftishness figures in our perception of the building therefore means that the latter instantiates a certain character aspect – either a non-presentational aspect, or the presentational aspect of presenting the building as being the monadic property of being to the left.⁸

Which view is to be preferred in the end does not matter here. Indeed, it is not so clear whether they actually differ in any substantial way – which might explain why Martin appears to switch between both views in some of his formulations (e.g., when talking about the quality of itchiness). The step from acknowledging the presence of a non-presentational aspect of the character of a perception to projecting this aspect onto the perceived object is indeed small – as discussions about blur or similar phenomena illustrate (see, for instance, Peacocke (1983), as well as Soldati & Dorsch (2011)). Moreover, any presentation of something as being leftish would lack the status and force of the presentation of it as being to our actual and present left. In particular, we do not see the building as having the monadic property of being to the left; and we are not inclined or entitled to believe it to genuinely instantiate this property. Of course, we may say ‘the building is to the left’. But when prompted, we will happily clarify that what we really meant was that it is to the left of us.

In any case, that the character of our perception of the building include this phenomenal aspect – let us call it the *aspect of leftishness* – should not be doubted. We can attend to it; and we can exploit it when drawing a picture of how the building looks like when seen from our current point of view. That is, we can depict an object as being to our actual left by drawing it on the left side of the canvas – instead of, say, by drawing both ourselves and the object.⁹

But how is the instantiation of the aspect of leftishness linked to the perception of the property of something as being at some specific location to our actual left? More generally, how does the perspectivalness of an experience relate to the determination of what is

7 It should become clear very shortly that there is a third possibility: the experience may represent another experience as instantiating or presenting the quality.

8 Using the expression ‘being to the left’ to denote a monadic property is not ideal, since this expression clearly has some connotations of relationality. But it is not easy to come up with another formulation, without altogether losing the connection to the perceived property of being to our actual left. I am grateful to one of the referees for making me aware of this issue.

9 Very similar issues arise, for instance, with respect to the status of the quality of ovalness – another perspectival aspect of perception – which figures in our experience when we are looking at objects from an angle and perceive them as round. Again, we typically draw round objects by tracing elliptical shapes on the canvas. But it is debatable whether our experiences present round objects as elliptical in addition to presenting them as round (see, for instance, Peacocke’s discussion (1983) of what he calls *sensational properties*). One significant difference from egocentric orientation is, however, that, while roundness is an objective property, being to the left of us is not.

experienced? Martin's insightful observation is that the former suffices for the latter (see Martin (2002): 410). If an experience of an object exemplifies leftishness – that is, shows a respective non-presentational phenomenal aspect or, alternatively, presents the object as being to the left – then it is an experience of the object as being to our actual left. More specifically, the presence of the perspectival aspect of leftishness is sufficient to ensure, first, that the experience concerned is an experience of something as being to our *left* (rather than to our right) and, second, that it is an experience of something as being to our *actual* left (rather than to our left in a merely possible situation). Indeed, Martin claims even more, namely that it also suffices for having a *perceptual* experience of something as being to our actual left. This makes sense since the other two kinds of visual experience, which may involve the aspect of leftishness, are not – or at least not in their simplest forms – concerned with our current environment. Episodes of visualising present objects as part of imagined situations (see below), while episodes of visual memory present objects as part of past situations. I return below to the issue of how important this additional claim is for Martin's argument.

That the instantiation of the aspect of leftishness turns the respective experience into an experience of something to our actual left is a direct consequence of the implicitness involved in our perception of the spatial relations that objects bear to us in egocentric space. As noted above, we see objects as being to our actual left (and not, say, as being at an egocentric location in some merely possible space). But this relational property is typically not explicitly given to us. Instead, what figures in our experience is solely the monadic quality of leftishness. Hence, we perceive the instantiation of the property of being to our actual left simply by being aware of the quality of leftishness. When we see the building as being to our actual left, no aspect of our perception but its aspect of leftishness plays a role in determining that we experience the building at that specific location in our actual environment. If the aspect of leftishness is taken to be presentational, this thought becomes even more straightforward: our perception presents the building as being to our actual left just by presenting it as being to the left; no other presentational element is needed or involved. What we are confronted with here is the particular subjectivity of the aspect of leftishness. Its actual instantiation is both necessary and sufficient for the experience of something as being to our

actual left.¹⁰

However, as Martin notes, these considerations about perception give rise to a puzzle in the case of visualising (see Martin (2002): 410). On the one hand, our episodes of visualising involve the same kind of perspectivalness as our episodes of seeing (see Hopkins (1998): ch. 7). We visualise buildings as being to the left of certain subjective points of view. And we normally do so without explicitly presenting those points of view or any subjects occupying them. What figures in our respective imaginative experiences is therefore, again, the monadic quality of leftishness, and not the relational property of being to the left of some subject in the subject's environment. But this means that our episodes of visualising may involve the same phenomenal aspect of leftishness as our episodes of seeing. Indeed, this is partly due to the relative simplicity of our visual presentation of the egocentric orientations of objects. It is devoid of any explicit reference to the subject of experience and, therefore, allows us to visualise something as being to the left without thereby visualising it as being to the left of any particular subject.

On the other hand, when visualising buildings as being to the left of subjective points of views, we need not – and typically do not – imagine them as being to our actual left. At least in the simplest cases, our episodes of visualising do not locate their objects in our actual environment, but instead in some imagined space (see Sartre (1940): 8ff., and Wittgenstein (1984): sec. 622 and 628).¹¹ Of course, we can project our image onto our actual environment by taking what we imagine to be part of actual space. But even then, there is no real competition between what we see and what we visualise. For example, when looking at a certain picture on our kitchen wall, we may visualise with open eyes how things would look if there were a different picture at the same spot on the wall. But such a complex and mixed presentation does not amount to a presentation of the impossible state of affairs of two pictures occupying the same part of space.

So, episodes of visualising may involve the aspect of leftishness without presenting

¹⁰ Of course, Martin cannot assume in his argument that an experience's instantiation of the aspect of leftishness is also sufficient for the existence of something to our actual left. This would follow only if the experience is a perception, and if perceptions are always factive – something that intentionalists deny.

¹¹ There is also the issue of whether visualising always locates objects relative to us (understood as part of the imagined situation), or rather to some other imagined subject. The default case seems to be that we visualise objects as orientated towards ourselves (i.e., our point of view within the imagined world), and that imaginative projects involving imagined subjects different from us require the additional identification of our imagined point of view with that of those other subjects (see Wollheim (1984) and Martin (2002a): 411).

something as being to our actual left. But due to the subjectivity of the aspect of leftishness noted above, its instantiation is inseparably linked to the presentation of something as possessing the relational property of being to our actual left. Hence, the instances of visualising concerned cannot exemplify the aspect of leftishness. This raises the question of how it is involved in visualising instead. Martin's proposal is that, in visualising, we imagine an experience as instantiating the aspect of leftishness – that is, we imagine a perspectival experience of something as being to the left in the imagined situation. When we visualise a building as being to the left, our imaginative episode does not instantiate the aspect of leftishness. But it still involves the latter by representing another experience as instantiating it.

The proposal captures the specific subjectivity of the aspect of leftishness. For it takes the instantiation of that aspect *in a certain world* to be sufficient for the occurrence of an experience of something as being located to the experiencing subject's left *in that very same world*. Actual perspectival experiences concern actual space, while imagined perspectival experiences concern imagined space. Moreover, what needs to be imagined is a perceptual experience. As noted above, other perspectival experiences are not concerned with the current state of the world in which they themselves occur. Instead, they are concerned with the past of that world (as in the case of visual recall), or with an entirely different possible world (as in the case of visualising). Hence, neither episodic memories, nor imaginative episodes can instantiate the subjective aspect of leftishness. If we want to imagine an experience with that aspect, we therefore have to imagine a perspectival perception. This conclusion can also be inferred more directly from Martin's additional claim mentioned above, namely that the presence of leftishness suffices for the presence of perception. Indeed, the reasoning put forward in support of that claim has been very similar to the one rehearsed in the second half of this paragraph. But, strictly speaking, the additional claim does not seem to be necessary for Martin's argument.

Martin further illustrates this argument by comparing the subjective perspectivalness of perceptions to the subjective aspects involved in some bodily sensations. His example are experiences of itchiness; but experiences of pain are equally good candidates (see Dorsch (2012a): sections 11.5 and 14.3).¹² Experiences of itch instantiate the phenomenal aspect of

¹² Nothing here depends on whether the presented view on itches and sensations of itch (or the comparable view on pains and pain experiences) is correct. The analogy is merely meant to further illustrate Martin's treatment of the involvement

itchiness: they are sensations of itch. Moreover, having a sensation of itch is sufficient for there actually being an itch and, hence, for experiencing an actual itch. If we sense an itch at a certain location on our skin, then that part of our skin does indeed itch – independently of whether there is any skin irritation, say. By contrast, merely imagining our skin as itching does not involve the presentation of an actual itch. In particular, it does not induce us to scratch the respective part of our skin. But this raises, again, the question of how imagining an itch can still involve the phenomenal aspect of itchiness – which it clearly does, albeit possibly to a lesser degree of intensity and determinacy than real feelings of itch. For, otherwise, imagined itches would not phenomenally resemble genuine itches and, moreover, be classified as imagined *itches* in the first place. As above, the solution is to understand imagining an itch as imagining a sensation of itch – that is, as imagining an experience which instantiates the phenomenal aspect of itchiness. This concludes what are, in essence, Martin's considerations in favour of the truth of the Dependency Thesis, as limited to some central cases of visualising.

2. A Second Argument

However, the analogy with itch (or the similar analogy with pain) suggests a second route to the conclusion that visualising the orientation of objects in egocentric space requires imagining perceiving that orientation. Feeling an itch is not only sufficient for the existence of itch, it is also necessary for the latter. Our skin does not really itch if we do not feel itch. Of course, other things may distract us so that we do not always notice the itch. But if we do not feel any itch at some location on our skin, despite being sufficiently attentive to the latter, it does not seem true to say that that part of the skin in fact itches. In particular, by-standers cannot insist that we sense an itch by pointing to some irritation of our skin. Such evidence cannot trump our failure to feel an itch. Accordingly, the presence of an itch requires an experience of that itch – and, presumably, as part of the same (actual) world. Hence, imagining an itch has to involve imagining sensing that itch.

Now, egocentric orientational properties seem to be similarly subjective – opening up the

of subjective elements in imaginative experience.

possibility of formulating a similar argument in favour of the Dependency Thesis with respect to visualising. Martin does not discuss this second route to the conclusion; and it is not clear whether he would accept the subjectivity of egocentric orientations, or the argument exploiting it. But even if not, it is still worthwhile to discuss both. When we see a building as being to our left, it does not possess this orientation independently of being perceived by us as having it. Certainly, the objective location of the building comes with the disposition of giving rise to a perception of leftishness when viewed from a position to its North-West by a normal human being with a normal orientation in objective space (e.g., standing on his feet, etc.) who faces South. But its perceived property of being to our left cannot simply be reduced to this objective disposition. Instead, the instantiation of this egocentric orientation seems to depend on our actual perceptual awareness of it.

For one thing, which dispositional property is correlated to the property of being to the left of us varies with changes in our location in objective space. Once we begin to move or turn around, the building may very well cease to be to our left – though it may also begin to be to the left of another person who steps in and takes our previous spot. The disposition may therefore constitute the property of being to the left of whoever occupies the objectively specified location to its North-West with the respective objectively specified orientation. But it does not amount to the property of being to the left of *us* (understood in first-personal terms). This is reflected in the more general fact that egocentric space cannot be fully specified in objective terms – which is why the two are to be distinguished in the first place. In particular, what we describe with the expression ‘to our left’ is not a cardinal direction in objective space (see Campbell (1994): especially ch. 4).

Without this lack of strict correlation between egocentric and objective spatial features, it would also seem impossible to explain why we cannot suffer an illusion with respect to perceiving something as being to our actual left. Of course, when facing South, we may perceive a building as being to our actual left while, in fact, it is located to the South-West of our current location in objective space. But, as the previous considerations have indicated, the objective orientational properties of the building are neither sufficient, nor necessary for its instantiation of any subjective orientational property. What happens in cases like this is just that we fail to track the former by perceiving the latter – an error which is due to some

breakdown in our relation to our environment.¹³

But the subjectivity of egocentric orientations has consequences for our attempts to visualise objects as having them. Objects can possess these subjective features only when they are perceived as having them. Furthermore, this is true as much of imagined or other possible situations, as it is true of actual ones – assuming that they all contain the same ontological kind of objects and properties. Finally, the dependency in question does not range over different possible worlds, but is confined to a single one: the perceived object and the perception are always part of the same world. Hence, visualising an object as having such an experience-dependent property requires imagining a suitable perception of that object. Visualising a building as being to the left, for instance, has to involve imagining a perception of a building as being to the left.

3. The Nature of Experiential Imagining

It should now be easier to understand why some of the objections raised against the considerations in support of the Dependency Thesis about visualising – or, more generally, about sensory imagining – have in fact been missing their target. In many cases, this is due to the fact that the critics have overlooked or underappreciated the importance of subjectivity in the two presented lines of thought. In Dorsch (2010) and Dorsch (2012a, section 10.3), I describe at length why the various objections of Currie and Ravenscroft (2002), Noordhof (2002) and Burge (2005) to the Dependency Thesis fail for precisely this reason.

Here, I would like to focus solely on the charge that understanding visualising in terms of imagining perceiving raises more questions than that it answers. It is worthwhile to note that, if this charge is adequate, it poses a general difficulty for all views about the nature of visualising, assuming that the argument concerning the visualisation of egocentric orientations goes through. But it is true that more needs to be said about the nature of experiential

¹³ The property of being to our left shares both discussed aspects with the property of being here if ascribed to ourselves. The latter, too, cannot be specified in purely objective terms. And we cannot go wrong in being aware of ourselves as being here. One difference between our awareness of us as being here and our awareness of other objects as being to our left is, however, that the latter may concern hallucinated objects. This is not problematic for the present argument since it relies only on the claim that the instantiation of egocentric orientations requires the occurrence of a perception of them, but not on the reverse claim. Besides, as suggested in note 11 above, there are perhaps other ways of reconciling the subjectivity of a property with the possibility of hallucinating an instance of it.

imagination and, in particular, how it can accommodate certain important features of visualising – notably its involvement of a visual and perspectival presentation of external things, combined with a cognitive attitude. Part of this explanatory challenge can be restated by the distinction between the exemplification and the representation of a subjective aspect of character. Episodes of seeing exemplify a perceptual character, while episodes of visualising – if they amount to experiential imagination – involve the imaginative representation of such a character. What then needs explaining is how the proposed kind of representation can ensure that the character of representing (i.e., that of visualising) is very similar to the represented character (i.e., that of seeing) in the mentioned respects (i.e., visual presentation, perspectivalness and cognitive attitude), without being identical to it.

In addition to the problems just mentioned, there is obscurity in the explanation provided by the Dependency Thesis. It rests upon the idea that the experience is represented in imagination. But it is unclear how to cash this out. [...] It is hard not to think that all the explanatory work is being done by the nature of imagination and the kind of representation which serves it. (Noordhof (2002): 447)

Noordhof is absolutely right about the last point. But the proposed kind of representation is perhaps less mysterious than it might seem to him and others. Consider the reproduction of a painting – for instance, a postcard hanging at your wall. This image does not itself amount to a painting and differs substantially from one (e.g., it does not involve paint and has no perceivable texture). But it none the less inherits important aspects of the reproduced painting. Most of all, it depicts the same objects and features, and from the same perspective, as the painting. Indeed, if the reproduction is done well, its perspectivalness derives from that of the reproduced painting, and not from the perspectivalness of the photographic process involved in the reproduction. That is, the impact of the point of view occupied by the lens directed at the painting is typically negligible in comparison to the impact of the point of view inherent to the photographed depiction.¹⁴ Much more can surely be said about how the reproduction does

¹⁴ The process of photo-copying, which does not involve any such perspective onto the reproduced piece of paper, is perhaps an even better illustration of the kind of representation pertaining to experiential imagination (as proposed by Martin in a personal discussion about how best to understand Hume's Copy Principle; see also Dorsch (2012a): chapter 9).

end up presenting the same situation from the same perspective as the painting. But the absence of such further elucidations does not render the kind of representation involved in photographic reproduction mysterious or completely unilluminating. We accept that this kind of representation exists. And the description given above gives us some grasp of what it amounts to. In fact, we know at least that the reproduction represents the painting partly by representing the visual perspective of the painting; and that it represents the latter's perspective by presenting the same objects and features as they are presented to the point of view of the painting.

Imagining a perception involves the same kind of representation. It represents a perception partly by representing the latter's perspective. And it does this by presenting the same external objects and features as they are presented to the point of view of such a perception. In imagining a perception, we thus imagine a possible perceptual perspective onto the world.¹⁵ And, as in the case of the reproduction of a painting, the resulting episode of visualising ends up with a character very similar in its visual, perspectival and attitudinal character to that of an episode of seeing. Besides, we also know that this imaginative representation of a perceptual perspective constitutes an experiential form of object awareness, which may be spelled out in intentional terms – an idea which, incidentally, disjunctivists about perceptions may agree with. Although it leaves many issues open, this characterisation of what experiential imagining amounts to, and how it can inherit some of the features of the imagined experiences, should be illuminating enough to rebut the charge of obscurity. The proposed kind of representation is involved in other phenomena as well. And we have some understanding of how it can explain the presence of the important features of reproductions and episodes of visualising noted.

To illustrate that explanatory power, it is worthwhile to have a brief look at how this account of experiential imagination can answer a challenge raised by Currie and Ravenscroft ((2002): 28).¹⁶ They ask for an account of why it is possible that we may mistake an instance

¹⁵ This idea is not new. In particular, Hume's Copy Principle may be read as claiming pretty much the same if applied to the case of imagining.

¹⁶ Reference to the kind of representation at issue promises also to illuminate why episodes of visualising often possess a lesser degree of repleteness, determinacy or intensity than episodes of seeing. Just as the reproduction of a painting may lead to the loss of some of these qualities, imagining perceiving something may have this effect. Martin's employment – in Martin (2001) – of the Dependency Thesis in his account of the phenomenal differences between seeing, visually remembering and visualising provides another example of the explanatory force of treating at least some instances of visualising as an instance of experiential imagination.

of seeing for an instance of visualising, or that we may recall something as seen that we have merely visualised in the past (e.g., as in the case of fabricated memories). Their suspicion is that the defenders of the Dependency Thesis do not have the resources to identify the underlying similarities, assuming that they have to accept a difference between what we see and what we visualise as part of the respective experiences.

How could we explain, on this hypothesis, why people are prone to misrecall visualising as seeing, and in some circumstances will mistake perception for visualisation? According to the hypothesis, visualising an *F* has the representational content, not *F*, but *seeing an F*. Thus the seeing and visualising have quite different contents. Why would states with such different contents seem to us to be so similar? Content is just one dimension of similarity; perhaps states could differ in content and be similar in other ways. But the hypothesis offers us no account of what these other similarities might be and how they could, in the face of content-dissimilarity, sustain the overall phenomenological similarity that seeing and visualising enjoy. (Currie & Ravenscroft (2002): 28)

One part of the answer to this challenge is to stress that, for a proponent of the Dependency Thesis about visualising, there is – contrary to what Currie and Ravenscroft suggest – a substantial overlap in content between seeing and visualising. For imagining a perception of an external object involves the visual presentation of that object as part of the imagined situation – just as the reproduction depicts whatever is depicted by the reproduced painting. In other words, experiential imagination has two objects: the imagined perceptual experience and the external thing presented by that experience (and visualised as part of the instance of experiential imagination concerned).¹⁷ The other part of the reply to Currie's and Ravenscroft's challenge is that, as already illustrated by reference to the analogy with the reproduction of paintings, the presentation of external things involved in imaginatively adopting the subjective perspective of a perception shares many important aspects with the presentation of those things involved in perceiving them from such a perspective. Accordingly, seeing and imagining seeing resemble each other, not only in what they make us aware of, but also in how they present it to us. This is indeed best explained by reference to

¹⁷ See Dorsch (2010) for more on how both certain disjunctivist and certain intentionalist approaches to perception can accommodate the fact that imagining seeing involves two objects of awareness.

the truth of the Dependency Thesis about visualising, according to which it consists literally in imagining seeing.¹⁸

References

- Burge, Tyler (2005). 'Disjunctivism and Perceptual Psychology', in: *Philosophical Topics* 33, pp. 1-78.
- Campbell, John (1994). *Past, Space and Self*. Cambridge (Mass.): MIT Press.
- Currie, Greg & Ravenscroft, Ian (2002). *The Recreative Mind: Imaginations in Philosophy and Psychology*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Dorsch, Fabian (2010). 'Transparency and Imagining Seeing', in: *Philosophical Explorations*, vol. 13, pp. 173-200.
- (2012a). *The Unity of Imagining*. Frankfurt: Ontos.
- (2012b). 'Experience and Introspection', in: F. Macpherson & D. Platchias (eds.), *Hallucination*. Cambridge (Mass.): MIT Press.
- Dorsch, Fabian & Soldati, Gianfranco (2011). 'Intentionalism, Phenomenal Error and Experiential Error'. Manuscript submitted for publication.
- Hopkins, Robert (1998). *Picture, Image and Experience*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Martin, M. G. F. (2001). 'Out of the Past: Episodic Recall as Retained Acquaintance', in: C. Hoerl & T. McCormack (eds.), *Time and Memory*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- (2002). 'The Transparency of Experience', in: *Mind and Language*, vol. 17, pp. 376-425.
- Nagel, Thomas (1974). 'What Is It Like to Be a Bat?', in: *The Philosophical Review*, vol. 83, pp. 435-50.
- Nordhoof, Paul (2002). 'Imagining Objects and Imagining Experiences', in: *Mind and Language*, vol. 17, pp. 426-455.

¹⁸ I would like to thank Tim Crane, Rob Hopkins, Mike Martin, Paul Nordhoof, Gianfranco Soldati and Marcus Willaschek for very helpful discussions and comments on previous versions of this paper. I am also grateful to the Swiss National Science Foundation for their generous support of my research as part of a Fellowship for Advanced Researchers (no. PA00P1 126157).

- O'Shaughnessy, Brian (2000). *Consciousness and the World*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Peacocke, Christopher (1983). *Sense and Content: Experience, Thought, and Their Relations*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- (1985). "Imagination, Experience and Possibility", in: J. Foster & H. Robinson (eds.), *Essays on Berkeley*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Sartre, Jean-Paul (1940/2004). *The Imaginary: A Phenomenological Psychology of the Imagination*. London: Routledge.
- Williamson, Timothy (1990). *Identity and Discrimination*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Wittgenstein, Ludwig (1984). *Zettel. Werkausgabe Band 8*. Frankfurt: Suhrkamp.
- Wollheim, Richard (1984). *The Thread of Life*. New Haven: Yale University Press.